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# Letters to the editor

## Homelessness and HIV/AIDS: Twin Plagues Driving to Staggering Toll

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Housing is known to improve the health outcomes of individuals living with HIV/AIDS. It is instrumental in keeping them in care and in compliance with their medication regimens. As people are living longer, their housing needs become more pronounced and complex. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is up to nine times higher among persons who are homeless or unstably housed. Up to 60% of all people with HIV/AIDS report an experience of homelessness or housing instability.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is dramatically higher among homeless people than in the general population. Homelessness and HIV/AIDS are widespread and intersecting problems that occur in both urban and rural populations throughout the whole world. Conditions associated with homelessness make HIV prevention and control especially difficult. Limited access to medical care severely restricts HIV/AIDS prevention, risk reduction and treatment for homeless persons. Adherence to complex HIV treatment regimens presents special challenges for homeless patients and their caretakers.

Preventive measures commonly used in other populations at increased risk for HIV infection are often unavailable to homeless men and women. Insufficient resources limit the health education and risk reduction interventions which media can provide. There is no HIV screening and counseling generally available to homeless individuals, who experience unique socio-economic and psychological barriers even when these services are available. Travel to healthcare providers for testing or to obtain test results is often difficult for people experiencing homelessness. Compounding these barriers is the lack of awareness to homeless individuals for sexually transmitted disease, psychoactive substance abuse and mental illness. Early identification and treatment of these conditions would assist in HIV and AIDS prevention. Lack of affordable housing is

a crucial problem facing a growing number of people living with AIDS and other illnesses caused by the HIV. People with HIV/AIDS absolutely lose their jobs because of discrimination or because of the fatigue and periodic hospitalization caused by HIV-related opportunistic diseases.

The homeless in Pakistan lead a miserable life. Still there is no comprehensive planning made for the homeless in our country. In this soaring age of inflation, people are sick and tired of paying monthly rents for most of their lives. The hike in rent is also noticeable and causing further distress to the homeless people.

The government must start a subsidy rental program on a monthly basis for the homeless that would provide them with shelter. This program should be included in the new budget so that people with low incomes can easily get a house for their families. A housing subsidy program ultimately succeeds only if there are an adequate number of affordable units. To accomplish this, the help of the city, state and federal governments will be required.

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